

Progressing from dialect awareness to critical language awareness and pedagogy: Equipping teachers to interrogating language, dialects, and power

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Linguists and teacher educators have long called for scientific information about language variation to be included in the educational experience of all students (NCTE/IRA 1996, Adger, Snow, & Christian, 2002, Godley et al. 2006, Reaser et al. 2017). Studies have suggested that such “dialect awareness” can improve students’ language attitudes and knowledge (Reaser 2006, Sweetland 2006, Charity Hudley & Mallison 2014, Henderson 2016, etc.). However, it is becoming increasingly clear that awareness is not sufficient to substantially impact the educational practices of teachers (Godley, Reaser, & Moore, 2015). The field of education has increasingly been calling for teachers to be equipped with critical approaches to language (Delpit 1988, Fairclough 1992, Janks 1999, Alim 2005, 2010, Godley & Minicci 2008), but many of these efforts lack the nuanced perspectives of language that linguists have, which may explain why both classroom-based studies (Godley, Carpenter & Werner 2007, Dyson & Smitherman 2009) and surveys of teachers (Cross, DeVaney, & Jones 2001, Blake & Cutler, 2003) continue to find deficit-based beliefs and pedagogies related to teachers’ opinions of vernacular-speaking students (and their academic potential).

To overcome this deficit thinking, teachers need more than awareness of linguistic facts, they need Critical Language Awareness for teaching. Teachers must understand and acknowledge whiteness and Standardized English as non-neutral, and to teach that both whiteness and Standardized English work to reinforce existing systems of power that privilege the language variety spoken by most middle and upper-class whites. They also must be equipped with strategies for moving their students toward this understanding. Such goals dovetail with calls for explicit teaching about and disrupting societal inequalities in education in the hopes of promoting equitable treatment of students with diverse racial, cultural, gender/sexuality and linguistic identities (Alsup & Miller 2014). Linguists are uniquely positioned to help teachers and teacher educators understand and fight largely invisible linguistic prejudice in the classroom. However, in order to effectively equip educators to be more effective agents of change, linguists must learn more about critical theory inspired pedagogies that might be useful in disrupting the linguistic status quo.

This workshop offers for linguists a theoretical explanation of Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP), and, just as important, a detailed description of how linguists can support the teaching of CLP approaches for pre-service teachers. We also examine ways linguists can use their expertise on language diversity to coordinate with colleagues in teacher education programs in mutually beneficial ways. We demonstrate and share successful materials and approaches from a number of projects, including a multi-year study with over 200 secondary-level pre-service English Language Arts pre-service teachers in eleven American universities and a prolonged collaboration with heritage Spanish speakers in New Mexico. The primary goal of the workshop is to help socially-oriented linguists progress from promoting language awareness to enacting the sorts of programs and collaborations that can advance linguistic social justice work in education. Furthermore, this workshop examines how preservice literacy teachers’ engagement with dialect diversity shaped their critical knowledge and CLP. Finally, we detail

how these approaches can reframe teachers' beliefs about language, literacy and their students. This workshop will mix presentation with participant engagement.

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